



**For immediate release
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NEWLY APPOINTED SCHOONER ERNESTINA COMMISSION MEMBERS HOLD INAUGURAL MEETING

Today is the first meeting of the newly appointed members of the Schooner Ernestina Commission, which is responsible for overseeing preservation and operation of the 113-year-old schooner. Ernestina is a National Historic Landmark and is the designated “official vessel of the Commonwealth” of Massachusetts. The schooner, which is moored at the New Bedford State Pier, is managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

The schooner was built in Essex in 1894, and initially named Effie M. Morrissey after the daughter of Ernestina’s first skipper, William Edward Morrissey. Ernestina was a Grand Banks fisher, an Arctic expeditionary vessel, and a World War II survey vessel. After a galley fire in 1947, the schooner was repaired and renamed Ernestina to serve in the trans-Atlantic Cape Verdean packet trade. The schooner fell into disrepair, was restored, and in 1982, was given by the Republic of Cape Verde to the people of the United States and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a symbol of the close ties between the lands. In 1990, Ernestina was designated a National Historic Landmark.

Since the Massachusetts Legislature designated Ernestina “the official vessel of the Commonwealth” in 1994 during the schooner’s centennial year, the ship has taken on a new mission of providing environmental education and maritime history lessons to students, teachers, and others. In 2000, Ernestina sailed the Eastern Seaboard as part of the OpSail and Tall Ships events ranging from the northern Chesapeake Bay to Halifax, Nova Scotia. In 2002, the ship underwent extensive keel repairs and has been dockside since 2004. Despite the Commonwealth’s significant investments, Ernestina requires more repair. In 2006, DCR announced plans to seek partners to help find the operational and capital funds needed to maintain and operate an historic schooner that is more than a century old.

Said Priscilla Geigis, Acting Commissioner of DCR, “The commission is charged with the important mission of helping develop a new partnership model that creates financial stability for capital repairs and operation of Ernestina so she can provide educational, cultural, and experiential programs for future generations.”

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Ian A. Bowles, Secretary, Executive
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Priscilla E. Geigis, Acting Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

The commission's public meeting is today at 1 p.m. at the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Visitor's Center, 33 William St., New Bedford. New Schooner Ernestina Commission members include:

Celeste Bernardo - Celeste Bernardo is superintendent of New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, of which Ernestina is a part. She has an interpretation and education background and extensive interest and experience in maritime history.

Paul J. Fonteyn - Paul Fonteyn has served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at the University of Massachusetts/Boston since July 2002. He also is working to establish a national network of neighborhood science centers that provide free, hands-on experiences for children in impoverished urban areas.

Laura Pires-Hester - As a Cape Verdean-American anthropologist and educator born and raised in Wareham, Ms. Pires-Hester co-lead the six-year effort to repair and repatriate Ernestina, cochairing the National Friends of Ernestina/Effie M. Morrissey and helping develop local Friends Committees in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. She co-authored the Ernestina/Effie M. Morrissey Commemorative Booklet published in 1982, and created an eight-panel display of the schooner's history. Pires-Hester is committed to finding new opportunities to revitalize the ship.

Eric Schoenfeld - Eric Schoenfeld is director of marketing for the Massachusetts Office of Business Development. He has worked in television, radio, and film and has a background in sales and information technology. With a strong belief in community service, he has been an associate advisor to Explorer Post 85, Emergency Service Squad Inc., in Westborough since 2000. He is an avid sailor.

Matthew R. Sisk - Matthew Sisk is special assistant to the General Services Administration's New England Regional Administrator, Dennis Smith. In addition, Sisk served as director of state Board and Commission Appointments under Governors Cellucci and Swift. He is Braintree's representative to the Blue Hills Regional District School Committee and is a town meeting member in Braintree.

Also on the commission is one representative each from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Education, and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism.

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